

January 29, 2007

Chairman McNutt and members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Butch Weedon and I am the Director of the MSU Fire Services Training School (FSTS). I very much appreciate Representative Bergren's introduction of HB 290 and I urge your support. For years, our agency has been in a position to assist local fire fighters in a variety of ways, and we have always done our best to provide that assistance. It recently occurred to me that the provision for such assistance, though good public policy, was beyond our statutory charge.

**Fire Services  
Training School**

The Columbus Rural Fire District was overwhelmed this past fire season. This all volunteer agency handled wildfire after wildfire in addition to the usual vehicle fire, heart attack, and cat in a tree. At one point their members were spent. Their chief asked FSTS for some relief and we were able to put together a five member crew of volunteers from the Great Falls area, who under the supervision of one of our trainers, went to Columbus and staffed their fire station for a week, giving their fire fighters a much needed break. The assignment provided an opportunity for our staff member and the group of volunteers to gain valuable experience.

We worked with the Butte Fire Department recently to improve their capability in handling vehicle crashes. We loaned them some of our hydraulic rescue gear while it was not committed for training. During the time they had our gear on loan, they used it at three crashes, rescuing three citizens. They have since purchased their own hydraulic rescue gear.

Our staff members have found themselves at emergency incidents in Columbus, Ashland, St. Labre, Rae, Sourdough, Billings, Red Lodge, Stevensville, and Havre. I found myself assisting local incident commanders on a couple wildfires this past summer. Such opportunities allow our staff valuable experience, helps build a trusting relationship with our customers, and provides us an ideal opportunity to assess training needs.

This bill does not create a new mission for our agency. This bill will not reduce the quality or volume of training our agency provides. It simply authorizes what we have been doing for years; taking maximum advantage of public resources for the public good!

Thank you for your attention and I will be happy to respond to your questions.

Respectfully submitted,

*Montana State University,  
U.S. Department of  
Agriculture and Montana  
Counties Cooperating.  
MSU Extension is an equal  
opportunity/affirmative  
action provider of  
educational outreach.*

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